

Yet now, 8 years later and with a new administration trying to determine America's best way forward, many Americans are understandably concerned and frustrated. Afghanistan is not where any of us want it to be, and our ultimate goal has not yet been met. Al-Qaida is still there and in Pakistan as well. Afghanistan's Government has not been able to take centralized control of the country. Elections there have not added to the legitimacy of the Karzai government. We have been left to reassess our position, and we must do this reassessment together.

Policymakers are asking the important and right question: What are the proper goals for our military effort in Afghanistan? How best can we accomplish them? Are these goals purely military goals? Can they be better solved with more troops or fewer? Do we need a more complex new mission in our future, which the military aspect is only one small part?

Unless we are sure, unless all of us are sure that more troops can help us meet our goals, we should not send them. Our soldiers already have sacrificed much. This time, in particular, is a difficult one for servicemembers and their families, and it is also proving to be a difficult one for those of us making policy.

As we decide what our direction will be in Afghanistan, the fallen brave soldiers we lost from Fort Carson this week are solemn reminders of how consequential our decisions have been and will be. Those of us who opposed going to war in Iraq, including President Obama, believed then it was the wrong war at the wrong time. We believed that Washington's focus on Iraq was diverting precious resources from our efforts in Afghanistan. We are still dealing with the consequences of the decision to focus on Iraq, both in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Recalling recent history is so important because now we have to find new wisdom on Afghanistan. At the same time, all 100 Members of this body know we must take great care as we make decisions that will affect the lives of our men and women in uniform and their families. For every soldier who answers our Nation's call to serve in combat, a new deployment is akin to a new decision to go to war. That is why our national purpose and their mission must be absolutely clear.

That is also why, as Members of this body, we must be willing to ask hard questions. The country will be counting on the Senate to scrutinize and understand the purpose of any decision to deploy additional troops. As we, together, debate a new approach to Afghanistan, I will be motivated by the memory of the Fort Carson soldiers who died this past week, as well as all those who have fallen in rank and Afghanistan. I know all of us feel the same way. They served honorably. So must we.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with the Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

FORT CARSON SOLDIERS

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to eight young men from Fort Carson in Colorado who perished last weekend in Afghanistan. This was the heaviest U.S. loss of life in a single battle since July 2008, when nine American soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.

In highlighting the lives of these young soldiers, I do not want to diminish the loss of other brave servicemen and women who have given their lives for our country. Before last weekend, Fort Carson alone had lost 270 soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we must continue to honor the courage of our fallen, our wounded, and those who continue the fight.

But I hope the stories of these eight young men today speak to the loved ones of all the brave men and women who have lost their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years. I honor their service, their courage, their dedication, their love of country and family. I thank their wives, husbands, children, parents, and other family members and friends for their support of these brave servicemen and women. And I want to express my deepest sympathy to them as they mourn their loss.

These eight soldiers were all from the same platoon—Bravo Troop of the 3rd Squadron, 61st Cav, 4th Infantry Division, based at Fort Carson. The 4th BCT has worked since May to secure territory throughout a four-province region near Jalalabad in some of Afghanistan's most rugged terrain, training in the nearby hills to prepare for high-altitude battle. A major achievement included providing security for Afghanistan's presidential election in August, enabling local Afghans to go to the polls.

I met with the 4th BCT commander, COL Randy George, back in April in Colorado, before Colonel George and his soldiers departed for Afghanistan. I know how hard Colonel George worked to get these soldiers ready for the

fight, and they were ready. These eight young men and their fellow soldiers fought valiantly, taking on about 200 insurgents in their remote outpost in Afghanistan's Nuristan province.

As MAJ Daniel Chandler, the rear detachment commander for the 4th

BCT, said: "They were attacked, the unit fought bravely, and in the end, they won the day."

I would like to say a few words about each of these men.

SPC Michael Scusa of Villas, NJ, was 22 years old. He joined the Army after graduating from high school and was on his second tour in Afghanistan. A former teacher said: He was a boy any mom would be proud to have. He leaves behind his wife and 1-year-old son in Colorado, as well as immediate family in New Jersey and Nebraska. SPC Christopher Griffin was 24 years old. He grew up in the small town of Kincheloe, MI. A high school classmate said that the "whole town" knew that Christopher would enlist someday. The Army was his calling—and he was very proud of it. He leaves behind his family in Michigan.

PFC Kevin Thomson of Reno, NV, was 22, and joined the Army in April 2008. Friends said that he could make anyone smile, that he valued friendship, and that he had a strong relationship with his mother. His photo hangs in Scolari's grocery store in southeast Reno, where he used to work. He leaves behind his family in Nevada and California.

SGT Vernon Martin of Savannah, GA, was 25 years old, and leaves behind a wife and three children and family in Georgia and New York. He joined the Army 6 years ago and had served in Iraq before being shipped to Afghanistan. His wife said that he hoped to work with kids someday—and that Vernon was the best thing that ever happened to her and their children.

SPC Stephan Mace of Lovettsville, VA, was 21 years old, and is survived by his family in West Virginia and Virginia. His mother said that he loved sports, wildlife, and the outdoors, and that he always had a smile on his face. He learned about patriotism from his grandfather, who served in the CIA during the Vietnam war, and had a strong love of his country and the military. Stephan's youngest brother just graduated from boot camp at Fort Sill—he wants to join the Army like his brother.

SGT Joshua Kirk—originally of Bonners Ferry, ID—was 30 years old. He leaves behind his wife and 2-year-old daughter in Colorado and mother in Idaho.

SGT Joshua Hardt of Applegate, California, was 24 years old, and was an outgoing and athletic young man—so talented at high school football that his helmet was retired. When Joshua was stationed at Fort Carson, he and his wife moved to Colorado together. Joshua leaves behind his wife and immediate family in California.